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Congress on the Internet

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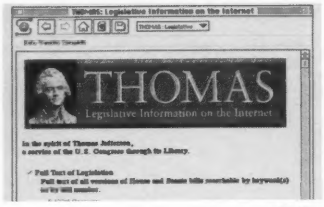
JAMES H. BILLINGTON
Librarian of Congress

28

On the Cover: Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Chairman of the House Oversight Committee William Thomas (R-Calif.) and Librarian of Congress James H. Billington on Jan. 5 cut the ribbon to announce the availability of THOMAS, the new congressional on-line database administered by the Library of Congress. *Photo by Craig Hobson*

Cover Story: The availability of THOMAS over the Internet gives citizens across the country another way to learn more about what their lawmakers are doing in Washington. 27

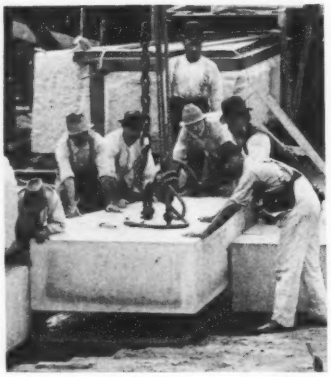


32

On the Web: The THOMAS service is available on the World Wide Web, the fastest-growing portion of the Internet. 32

News from the Center for the Book 33

Publications 35



34

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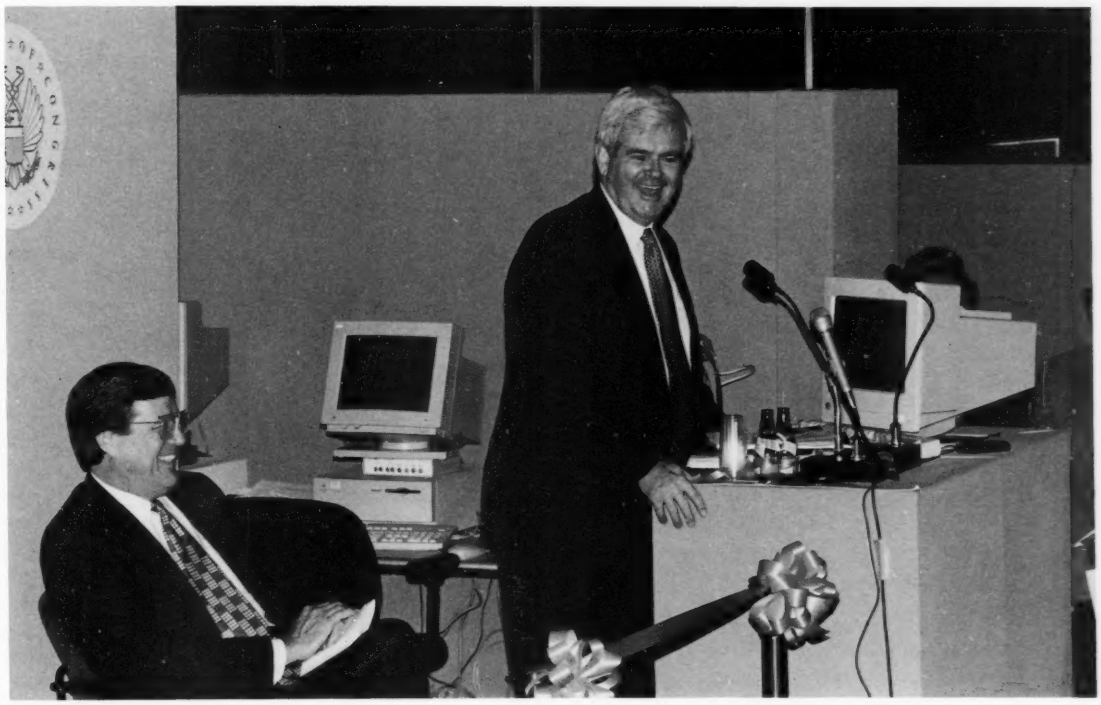
GUY LAMOLINARA, Editor
YVONNE FRENCH, Editorial Assistant
MALINDA B. NEALE, PEGGY F. PIXLEY, Printing and Processing Section
JOHN J. KOZAR, Publisher



Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Rep. William Thomas share a laugh during the Jan. 5 announcement of the THOMAS on-line congressional database. *Photos by Jim Higgins*

Congress on the Internet:
New Web Server Organizes On-Line Information

by Guy Lamolinara

On the second day of the new Congress, Jan. 5, a new source of information on the legislative body made the business of the nation's lawmakers more accessible to their constituents.

Named after the third president, THOMAS, a World Wide Web server administered by the Library, brings together much of the congressional information available on-line in disparate places on the Internet.

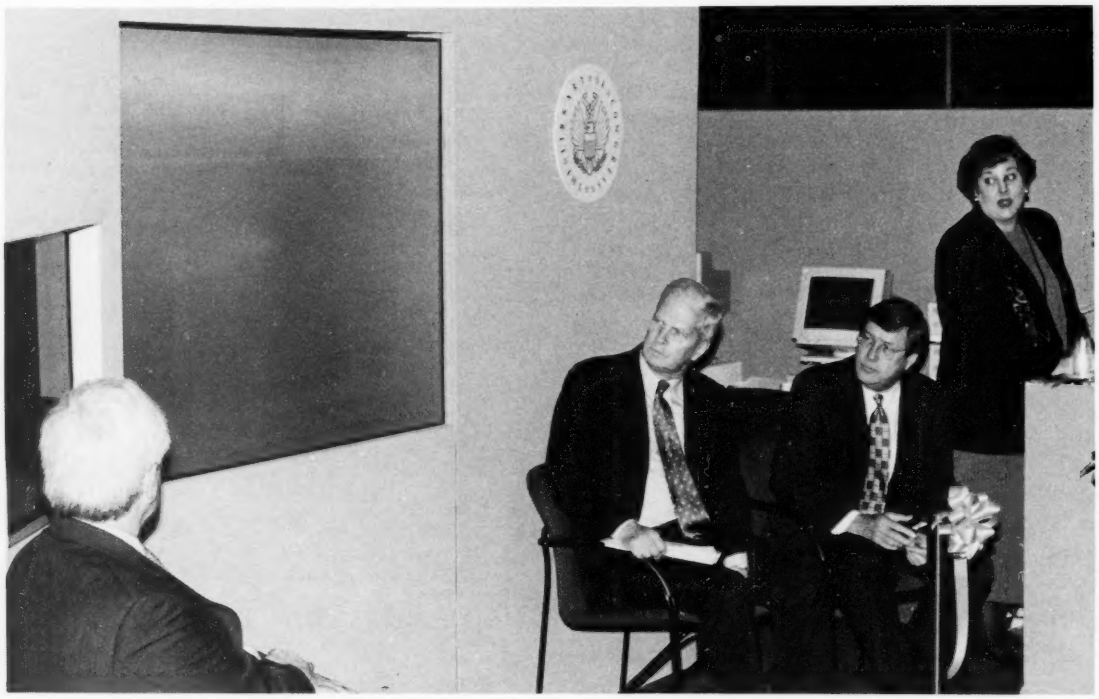
The bipartisan project was initiated by the congressional leadership.

"Thomas Jefferson, our third president and principal author of the Declaration of Independence, believed that the people's representatives, in the discharge of their functions, should communicate with their constituents, as he put it, 'free, full and unawed by any'. . . . Today's introduction of THOMAS will bring us closer to Jefferson's dream," said Dr. Billington from the podium in LC's Digital Library Visitors' Center, where the opening ceremony took place.

Jefferson's vision of an informed electorate was also on the mind of Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), who had been sworn in the day before.

"If Jefferson were alive today and if Jefferson had our advantages and our opportunities, how would he then think about information and the American people and the process of democracy?" Rep. Gingrich asked. "I think [THOMAS] is a step in the right direction."

THOMAS is an online public access information system available over the Internet's World Wide Web. This single public gateway to information about Congress, although not exclusive, is a readily accessible service to the American people so they can better understand the work of their lawmakers.



Judith Stork of Information Technology Services gives a demonstration of THOMAS as Speaker Gingrich, Dr. Billington and Rep. Thomas observe.

THOMAS currently offers:

☐ The full text of bills from the 103rd Congress and those introduced in the 104th

☐ *How Our Laws Are Made* by House Law Revision Counsel Edward F. Willett, which explains the process, from proposal to final enactment stage, of how a bill becomes law

☐ The House of Representatives Gopher (information system), which includes directory information for members and committees, the latest daily committee hearing schedules, the current week's floor schedule and visitor information

☐ The text of the resolution adopting rules of the House for the 104th Congress

☐ The C-SPAN Gopher, which provides gavel-to-gavel coverage of the U.S. House of Representatives

☐ The electronic-mail addresses of those members and committees having Internet addresses and

☐ Links to the Library's World Wide Web server and its Gopher, LC MARVEL.

Future enhancements will include the *Congressional Record* and LC's *Bill Digest*. Comments to the THOMAS service can be sent to **thomas@loc.gov**.

Congressional leaders chose LC as the operator of THOMAS not only because it is the legislative body's library, but also because the Library has extensive experience in providing free public access to its databases of more than 40 million records to Internet users, among other information. The Library has already built a strong automation infrastructure to support a wide range of digital endeavors. These efforts provided the foundation for developing THOMAS, allowing the Library to oversee the system without significantly increasing its technical infrastructure.

Traditionally, the Library's Congressional Research Service has provided Congress with a wide variety of analytical services. In this capacity, it summarizes and tracks bills for lawmakers in its *Bill Digest*, produced by the Congressional Research Service. A distinctive feature of THOMAS will be to combine these summaries with the full text of bills. This will help users search more easily for legislation and understand more readily the lawmaking process.

LC officials said THOMAS is Congress's way of making information available to the maximum number of people; it does not compete with commercial services. These services

can add value and repackage this information for their own marketing purposes.

According to Rep. Gingrich, THOMAS will help change "the balance of power in America toward the citizens and out of the Beltway" (excerpts of his comments follow).

When the Speaker went on to say that "I could not come to the Library of Congress without saying that in my judgment we should be increasing, not decreasing, the budget of the Library of Congress," many in the audience applauded heartily.

"We can rapidly identify the Library staff," he joked.

The Speaker thanked staffers from the Library, the House Information Systems Office, the House Oversight Committee, the Joint Committee on Printing and the Government Printing Office, all of whom helped make the day's announcement possible. He also made a point of acknowledging the efforts of Rep. Vernon Ehlers (R-Mich.), who, according to the Speaker, "took the challenge . . . to see if we could in fact dramatically expand public access."

Next on the agenda was Chairman of the House Oversight Committee William Thomas (R-Calif.). "He [Gingrich] is the vision, I'm the reality," said Rep. Thomas, referring to his role on the committee—formerly the House Administration Committee—which will oversee Library operations.

Part of the "reality," said Mr. Thomas, is that "I'm going to be faced with daily fights, institutionally, to try to make sure that what we do is what we should be doing, that the public work that we do is easily accessed by the public. And the Library of Congress is integral to that."

Although most Senate information is not now available on THOMAS, Mr. Thomas emphasized the bicameral nature of the project, noting that it is important that "the House and the Senate coordinate."

"Once this press conference is over I've got to go to work to make sure" that THOMAS is accessible, he continued. He read the remarks of Dave Kosakowski, systems coordinator at the Walter W. Stiern Library at California State University at Bakersfield, who said, "The job of libraries is the dissemination of information, and today's announcement is a great step in Congress's march to ensure that the public has as much information about the workings of Congress as possible."

Repeating the slogan of the 104th Congress, Rep. Thomas concluded, "I will pledge to you that there will be much change."

Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) was unable to attend, but Dr. Billington read his remarks: "Today marks both the culmination of work by many people in all parts of the legislative branch and the beginning of a new effort to bring on-line access to a wide range of congressional information easily and conveniently to Americans everywhere. It is a bipartisan effort, and over time, as more libraries are equipped to offer public access to the Internet, THOMAS will bring greater understanding of both legislative issues and the legislative process."

Already, THOMAS has proved to be a huge success with the public. (By Jan. 13, more than 36,000 persons had accessed the system.)

Judging from an electronic-mail message from Gayle Christian, a librarian at Georgia State University, that Mr. Gingrich read, the system will be a hit in his home state: "I am delighted to use the new legislative search system THOMAS. This database is quite exciting, extremely easy to use."

From Charles Beard, library director at West Georgia College, Mr. Gingrich had another message: THOMAS represents an outstanding contribution toward making federal government processes accessible to students, faculty and staff of West Georgia College. . . . The full text of legislation will allow students and citizens to 'see sausage made.'"

The final part of the program was devoted to a THOMAS demonstration, provided by Judith Stork of

Dr. Billington and the House Speaker chatted briefly during the event.

Information Technology Services and Cheryl Graunke of the Congressional Research Service. On the large-screen monitor flashed the THOMAS "home page," or starting point, with a bust of Jefferson portrayed in the upper-left corner.

At the touch of a button, the full text of a bill appeared on the screen, and the audience was shown how the system enables a user to track a bill's progress. The search system underlying THOMAS is called Inquery, developed at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Following the demonstration, the program came to a close, putting the Library in charge of the technological aspects of what the new Speaker called "the world's first Third Wave, first information age, genuinely participatory dialogue on self-government."

Excerpts from the speeches follow:

Speaker Gingrich: . . . I want to first of all commend Dr. Billington . . . [for his] very aggressive and I think very farsighted effort to reach beyond the Gutenberg era and to understand the implications of the concept of a Third Wave information revolution and to begin to ask the question . . . "If Jefferson were alive today and if Jefferson had our advantages and our opportunities, how would he then think about information and the American people and the process of democracy?" and I think that [THOMAS] is a step in that direction.

. . . I additionally want to single out Don Jones [a member of LC's Madison Council], who said . . . the Library of Congress . . . because of the work that had already been started, was the perfect place to begin to build this.

. . . I want to make three points about how [THOMAS] will change things . . . [We] did a press event right after [this morning's] White House meeting. We said, "It was a wonderful meeting. The president

Suzanne Thorin, the Library's chief of staff, discusses the features of THOMAS and the Library's digitization activities.

was very positive. We had terrific interactions. We all talked about working together." The second question I got was from a reporter who said, "Well, how do you think it'll break down?"

There is a pervasive cynicism [in] the culture of Washington which, fortunately, does not exist [in] most of America.

And part of what [THOMAS] is going to do is get legislative information and legislative materials [to the public] beyond the cynicism of the elite. And you're going to see, I think, a dramatic expansion of an intellectual populism that Jefferson, I think, dreamed of but that has, for 200 years, not really grown up, of an informed populace that genuinely has access . . . to the topics they care about. Not the topic the [newspaper] editor cares about, not the thing which is this week's fad, not the latest scandal, but the specific area [people] want to know about on their terms, at their convenience.

[THOMAS] is going to become available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for literally everybody on the planet who wants to interface.

What this is going to do is, first, change the balance of power, because knowledge is power. Far more than lobbyist reform bills (and we'll look at that later on this year), far more than all the various things that Common Cause says. If every citizen had the access to information that the Washington lobbyists have, we would have changed the balance of power in America [in favor of] the citizens and out of the Beltway. And this [THOMAS] program really is a major step in that direction.

Second, this is going to lead to a dramatic shift toward thinking and talking about ideas rather than personalities. Television naturally lends itself to a scandal-mongering and personality-oriented style. . . . It's why you can have an M–TV kind of video effect. What we're now getting is the M–TV version of political coverage. . . . What [THOMAS] is going to do is expand the [the ability of] Americans to pursue information and, frankly, we're going to find . . . a remarkably large number tune into the substantive, factual and legislatively interesting parts [of the expanding information spectrum] and it's going to make for a dramatically healthier dialogue among Americans than does the current elite [news media] system.

The third fact is that I believe [THOMAS] allows us, for the first time in a mass democracy, to have genuine dialogues on a large scale. We're all faced with the fact that [each House member] represents over 600,000 people. . . . The Founding Fathers invented a system which was breathtaking compared to Athenian democracy, but which has just been drowned by the sheer size of our population, the scale of the country, the complexity of the issues. [THOMAS] will allow us to begin to have electronic town hall meetings. . . .

Let me say two last things. We're going to do a lot to balance the budget in the next few years . . . But I could not come to the Library of

Congress without saying that in my judgment we should be increasing, not decreasing, the budget of the Library of Congress.

I say it for this reason. Jefferson, who wanted a very limited, lean government, once, for example, vetoed a bill for a bridge across the Potomac on the grounds that it wasn't in the federal government's interest, even in Washington, to build a bridge.

Jefferson nonetheless believed passionately in knowledge and was quite prepared to help found the University of Virginia [and] was quite prepared to found the Library of Congress. . . . In a world that is shrinking, in an information age [cited] in Albert and Heidi Toffler's "Third Wave" civilization, the Library of Congress is the seminal knowledge dissemination system on the planet. We should strive for every child in America, in every school in America, no matter how rural, no matter how poor, to have electronic access to the world of knowledge. That is a national asset. We should strive to make it easy for every scholar to interact electronically. That's a national asset.

And the work done here and the work done at other libraries across the country are the most cost-effective investment in learning that we make. And they have all too often been neglected because they don't have a big union and they don't have a big lobby and they don't count in the way people keep score nowadays, but, if you care about knowledge, here is a place to spend more, not less, money, and here is a place [where] someone may well begin matching challenge grants from the Congress. . . . In [other] innovative approaches . . . there are ways to leverage the Library of Congress to spread the opportunity for prosperity and the opportunity for freedom across this planet. And that gets me to my final point.

The reason I'm excited about this experiment is I think it allows us, with the help of the House Information Systems Office and with the help of the Library . . . to reach out to the country and say, "Let's try to be the world's first Third Wave, first information age, genuinely participatory dialogue on self-government."

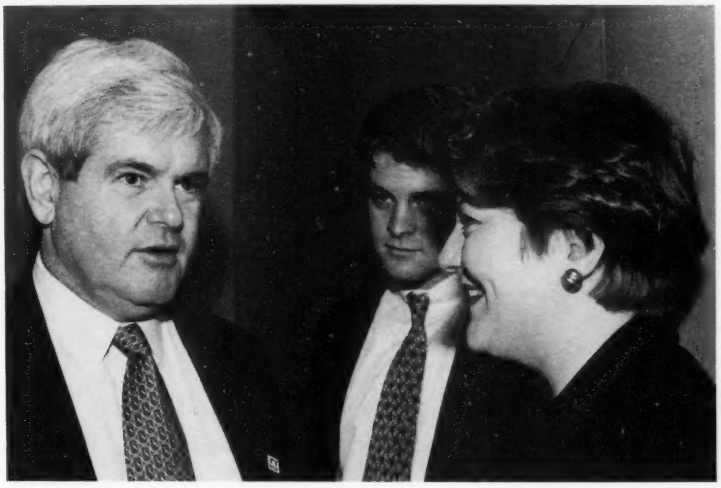
. . .Now the other thing it will lead to [is] having to rethink the Congress. . . . We don't have a clue what a Congress is going to be like or what representative government is going to be like, as this dialogue emerges. But what I am convinced of is that the right challenge is to start moving forward to engage in the experiment, to open ourselves up, to make the mistakes out in the open. . . .

Rep. Thomas: . . . He's the vision, I'm the reality. I guess I could say, "Ditto," and sit down. . . . I've got to go back and go to work to make sure that what we see in terms of the end product is structured in a way that you can get that end product, but first let me say that some of you may believe that the naming of this particular service, [THOMAS], is evidence of the thoroughness and the swiftness of the new majority in imposing itself on the system.

[Laughter.]

That's probably not true. What it is, obviously, is a continued affirmation of the third president and his vision, as Newt correctly said, in focusing on what is really important: knowledge and information. Obviously, that's going to change over time. The way in which it's delivered changes over time.

And I've spent a significant portion of my career as the minority member of what was then the House Administration Committee, trying to make sure that the Congress of the United States wasn't left behind in knowledge and information, not just for itself but in its interaction with its constituents and the service structures. For example, I remember a long argument with some contractors [requiring them to use fiber optic] cable instead of new twisted copper when we put in the new [House] phone system, trying



Just before leaving, Rep. Gingrich thanked LC's Judith Stork and Rich Pournelle of the House Oversight Committee for their role in the successful launch of THOMAS.

to get them to understand that we prepare for tomorrow today.

I've had an interesting dialogue with some of the folks around here in which it made sense to somebody to charge the Library of Congress to get the information that we'll be providing to them. I'm going to be faced with daily fights, institutionally, to try to make sure that what we do is what we should be doing, and that the public work that we do is easily accessed by the public. And the Library of Congress is integral to that. I think it's exciting that we're now joining the move that the Library of Congress made on its own, in cooperation with the private sector, in making sure that knowledge and information are provided in the format that the public wants, not that the Library of Congress requires, but that the public wants. . . .

As the chairman of the House Oversight Committee, I will pledge to you there will be much change in the 104th Congress. . . .

Rep. Gephardt (in a message read by Dr. Billington): "Today marks both the culmination of work by many people in all parts of the legislative branch and the beginning of a new effort to bring on-line access to a wide range of congressional information easily and conveniently to Americans everywhere. It is a bipartisan effort and, over time, as more libraries are equipped to offer public access to the Internet, THOMAS will bring greater understanding of both legislative issues and the legislative process. Just as C-SPAN provides a window on the House and Senate floor action and some committee hearings, so THOMAS will provide the basic working documents used by the Congress in their work on the public's behalf.

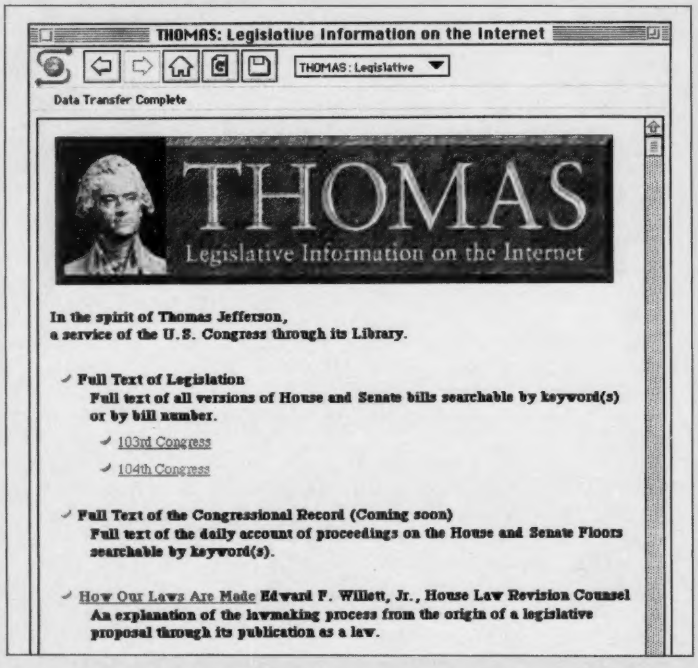
"So this is a major step forward and it is fitting that we welcome that step at the Library of Congress, which provides legislative support to the Congress and is the storehouse of the nation's history and creative endeavor.

What Is World Wide Web?

World Wide Web (WWW) is an Internet-based on-line information delivery tool created by CERN (European Laboratory for Particle Physics), making use of hypertext and hypermedia documents.

Hypertext/media refers to specially coded textual or multimedia documents that can link to other documents. In order to access WWW over the Internet, a "browser" client appropriate to your computing platform is used. There are WWW browsers for DOS, Windows, OS/2, Macintosh and UNIX platforms as well as many others. Some of the more popular WWW browsers can be obtained free-of-charge via anonymous FTP, while other browser software may be sold, along with Internet access, by commercial service providers.

Availability and How to Connect. THOMAS is available 24 hours a day. Connections to WWW resources are made by specifying a Uniform Resource Locator, or URL, through your locally loaded client software. *This is the preferred method of access.* The URL for THOMAS is: **http://thomas.loc.gov**. Access is also provided by direct telnet to **thomas.loc.gov**; then login as **thomas**. This access method provides a text-based browser only (it allows no viewing of graphics or images) and is limited to 20 simultaneous sign-ons. THOMAS also provides links to LC MARVEL (**marvel.loc.gov**) and the Library's Web server (**http://lcweb.loc.gov/homepage/lchp.html**).


THOMAS: Legislative Information on the Internet
THOMAS: Legislative
Data Transfer Complete
THOMAS
Legislative Information on the Internet
In the spirit of Thomas Jefferson,
a service of the U.S. Congress through its Library.
Full Text of Legislation
Full text of all versions of House and Senate bills searchable by keyword(s) or by bill number.
103rd Congress
104th Congress
Full Text of the Congressional Record (Coming soon)
Full text of the daily account of proceedings on the House and Senate Floors searchable by keyword(s).
How Our Laws Are Made Edward F. Willett, Jr., House Law Revision Counsel
An explanation of the lawmaking process from the origin of a legislative proposal through its publication as a law.

A portion of the THOMAS "homepage," or starting point

News from the Center for the Book:

'Libraries and Philanthropy' Conference Scheduled

The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa will host Library History Seminar IX from March 30 through April 1.

The seminar has chosen "Libraries and Philanthropy" as its theme. The plenary speakers are Phyllis Dain, Columbia University; Peter Dobkin Hall of the Yale University Program on Non-Profit Institutions; and Neil Harris, professor of history at the University of Chicago. Also featured will be 25 selected papers by historians, librarians, library educators and other scholars from six countries.

The papers are grouped into the following sessions: Library Philanthropy in India and Ancient Greece; Women and Philanthropy; Libraries, Beer and Tobacco; Public Libraries in Finland and Germany; Rockefeller Philanthropy; Library Volunteers in Canada; Children's Books and Scholarly Communication in the Cold War; African American Bibliography and Library Education; Carnegie Philanthropy (two sessions); Libraries and Literacy in France and the United States; the Council on Library Resources Inc.; and Reading and Scholarship.

The Center for the Book is one of four conference sponsors; others are the Library History Round Table of the American Library Association; the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy; and the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama.

For more information contact Gordon B. Neavill, Library and Information Science Program, Wayne State Univesity, 106 Kresge Library, Detroit, MI 48202; e-mail GNEAVIL@CMS.CC.WAYNE.EDU; phone (313) 577-0507; fax (313) 577-7563.

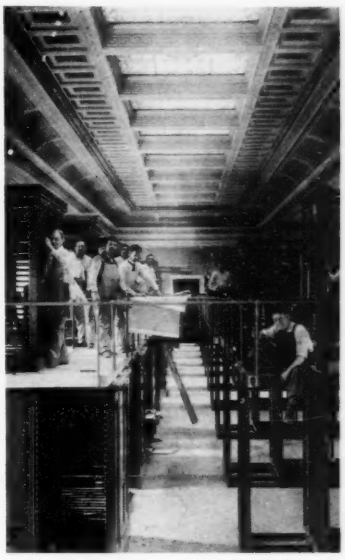
The Library History Seminar is the leading international forum for the presentation of scholarly work in the field of libraries. The seminars meet every five years and are widely regarded as one of the most intellectually stimulating gatherings in the library field. The Center for the Book has invited the seminar to convene its 10th session at the Library of Congress in the year 2000 as part of the Library's bicentennial commemoration.

☐ **LC History Projects Developing as Anniversaries Approach.** The Library's Thomas Jefferson Building will be 100 years old in 1997, a date that also marks the centennial of the formal creation of the Library's cataloging units and the Geography and Map, Manuscript, Music, Prints and Photographs and Serial and Government Publications divisions. As these anniversaries approach, the Center for the Book and other Library offices are developing symposia, lectures and publications—both popular and scholarly—about the Library and its history (see LC *Information Bulletin,* March 21, 1994).

The Library's Madison Council has provided funding support for several publications about the Library and its history, including *Jefferson's Legacy: A Brief History of the Library of Congress* (1993), *On These Walls: Quotations and Inscriptions in the Buildings of the Library of Congress* (in press) and a book that will be developed for publication in 1997 about the history, art and architecture of the Jefferson Building. Also slated for 1997 publication is a major book featuring the Library's visual collections, a project being coordinated by the Publishing Office. An exhibition on "Jefferson, Knowledge and Democracy" will open in the Jefferson Building in the spring of 1997.

Other publications being developed for the LC bicentennial include: a history of bibliography at LC; a history of LC's Gutenberg Bible; a history of the Asian collections; an "encyclopedia" of the Library of Congress; and a bibliography about the Library and its collections, services and activities.

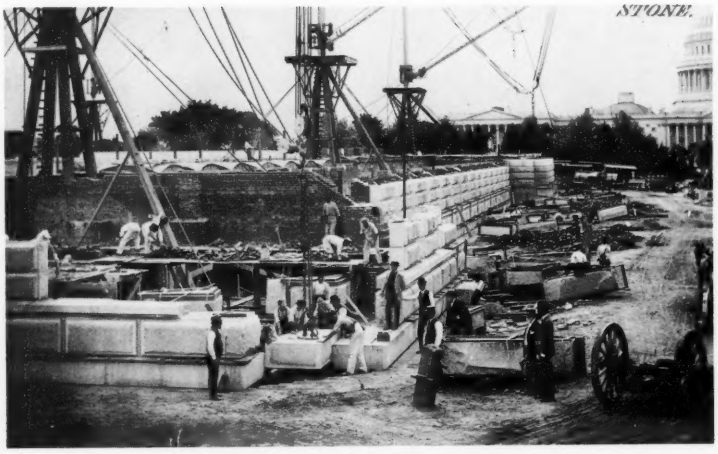
Other suggestions include a history of LC's collections since 1945; a biographical directory of LC employees; a scholarly history of the Library; an illustrated history of LC; a list of theses and dissertations about the Library, its collections and activities; and reprints of Herbert Small's *Handbook of the New Library of Congress* (1897), the 1896 congressional hearings on the Library's reorganization and the annual reports of the Librarian of Congress from 1861 to 1897. Additional ideas and proposals should be sent the LC History Project, Center for the Book, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540-8200.



Workmen erecting mahogany display cases in the South Gallery, circa 1905. *All photos from* For Congress and the Nation

☐ ***For Congress and the Nation* Available Again.** A history of the Library of Congress published in 1979 is once again available. *For Congress and the Nation: A Chronological History of the Library of Congress,* is a well-illustrated 196-page chronicle of significant events in the Library's history from 1774 to 1975. The book, notes author John Y. Cole, was compiled "in the year of the 175th anniversary of the founding of the Library." It emphasizes the origins of the Library's principal collections, services and administrative units, citing sources for each of the approximately 2,000 entries.

The book contains 75 black-and-white photographs and a detailed index compiled by Evelyn Sinclair of the Library's Publishing Office. *For Congress and the Nation* is available in the LC Sales Shop and by mail for $6. If ordering by mail, add $3.50 for postage and handling. Orders should be sent to the Library of Congress, Sales Shop, Washington, DC 20540–5240. Credit card orders may be placed by phone at (202) 707–0204.



Laying the cornerstone of the Jefferson Building, Aug. 28, 1890; Northeast Pavilion, 1901, where an exhibition of prints was mounted. The painting at the end of the gallery above the doorway, "The Arts," by Kenyon Cox, is 34 feet long and more than 9 feet high; strengthening the Library's foreign acquisitions program was a major accomplishment of Librarian Luther Evans (seated, left), who posed for this 1946 photo with members of the Library's Mission to Europe.

PUBLICATIONS

Library Publishes *NACO Participants' Manual*

The Library has just published the *NACO Participants' Manual*, a detailed, field-by-field guide to the theory and practice of authority record creation.

NACO, the Name Authority Cooperative Project, involves 140 research institutions. NACO participants, including the Library of Congress, create authority records—a preliminary step in the cataloging process—for inclusion in an international database called the Anglo-American Authority File (AAAF). At present, the AAAF contains standardized forms of more than 1 million names of authors, organizations and publishers' series.

Librarians worldwide are able to search the AAAF on-line and reuse its data in their libraries' catalogs. For catalogers, this saves time and effort, reduces the possibility of error and expands the access to collections that libraries provide their patrons.

The *NACO Participants' Manual* is a must for NACO participants and an invaluable reference for any cataloger doing authority work. The manual is also a valuable resource for users of Library of Congress name and subject authority files.

The *NACO Participants' Manual* is available for $18 in North America, $20 outside North America. Paperbound; 147 pages. To order, contact: Library of Congress, Customer Services Section, Cataloging Distribution Service/Dept. EV, Washington, DC 20541-5017; telephone: (800) 255-3666 (U.S. only) or (202) 707- 6100; TDD: (202) 707-0012; fax: (202) 707-1334; Internet: cdsinfo@mail. loc.gov.

Telephone Pioneers Honored

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped at the Library of Congress (NLS) recently published *Answering the Call: The Telephone Pioneer Talking-Book Machine-Repair Program 1960–1993* to recognize and celebrate the significant accomplishments of a major volunteer organization.

The 96-page book outlines the 35-year relationship between the library service and the Telephone Pioneers of America, a volunteer group of current and retired telephone company employees. *Answering the Call* describes the development of the repair program from its early days as a pilot project and reveals how the program expanded into a highly organized national undertaking.

Since 1960 the Pioneers have repaired more than 1.6 million talking-book machines for NLS. Maintaining and repairing the machines enable blind and physically handicapped persons throughout the United States to enjoy reading books and magazines from the NLS collection of 1.5 million titles. "This remarkable effort in 'answering the call' represents more than $8 million a year in high-quality machine repairs," according to NLS Director Frank Kurt Cylke. "We thank the Pioneers for their zealous service and look forward to a continued and fruitful association."

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped provides free braille and recorded books and magazines for 765,000 blind and physically handicapped persons through a network of 143 libraries throughout the United States.

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